

8.17.2007 - Transportation Update

At the close of the 20th century-thanks to American breakthroughs in transportation and the rise of automobiles, airplanes, and 44,000 miles of super highways-the world had become a healthier, safer, and more productive place and the U.S. was positioned as world leader in trade and industry.

As a Member of Congress, I put a great deal of time and energy into developing our Nation's transportation infrastructure to make sure that we retain our status as world leader and that our Nation's history of achievement continues for centuries to come.

It is with great pride that I recently accepted the Vice Chairmanship of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. I am honored to help steer such an important and influential committee, and look forward to continuing the effort to drive our country toward higher levels of greatness.

Because I have more than 30 years of experience in transportation policy under my belt, it is no coincidence that transportation is the first T of my "three T's" (Transportation, Technology, and Tourism) agenda. I firmly believe that a more secure and prosperous America begins with transportation, here at home, through proper investment in community transportation and infrastructure, and economic initiatives that will improve the overall strength and stability of Southern West Virginia.

The U.S. Department of Transportation tells us that for every \$1 billion of investment in our infrastructure, 47,500 jobs will be created. As Vice Chairman of the Transportation Committee, I strive to provide southern West Virginians, and all Americans, with safe and prosperous communities where they can find cutting-edge jobs, earn a livable wage, and enjoy all that our beautiful country has to offer.

Earlier this summer, I helped the U.S. House of Representatives pass a transportation funding bill that is a testament to how, even with tight fiscal constraints and pay-as-you-go budgetary rules, the 110th Congress is striving to invest in needed infrastructure. The bill provides \$40.2 billion to improve and maintain our Nation's aging highways and nearly \$600 million for highway safety programs.

I am particularly proud of the bill's increased funding for the modernization, safety, and efficiency of our Nation's airports. The bill pays special attention to airports in smaller, rural communities - the type that serve as economic engines here in southern West Virginia. It provides billions to ease congestion in over-crowded airports like the Tri-State Airport in Huntington, as our Nation's airport infrastructure prepares to handle the dramatic increase in passengers over the next several years. It also increases funding to the Essential Air Service Program, which helps support rural airports in Raleigh, Mercer, and Greenbrier counties.

Over the years, I have secured hundreds of millions of dollars of federal investment for new construction and improvements to southern West Virginia's transportation infrastructure. With every dollar, I ask myself: How can we turn this federal investment into jobs and a vibrant economy for hard-working West Virginians?

At Marshall University, the Rahall Transportation Institute (RTI) is doing just that. In 1998, I established the RTI to enhance the transportation and job creation in southern West Virginia and throughout the Appalachian region.

And nearly a decade later, I am proud to say that the RTI's hard work and achievements continue to pay off. Last month I proudly announced that they were awarded another \$3.01 million from the U.S. Department of Transportation for advanced transportation research. This funding will allow the RTI to continue to lure high-tech jobs and transportation investment to southern West Virginia and ensure the students at Marshall proudly uphold the institute's motto, 'building jobs through transportation,' for years to come.

As you can see, creating jobs through transportation is good for southern West Virginia. It is as simple as that.